Abstract of the Disclosure

A laser beam (102) cuts through a component carrier mask (96) made of thin elastomeric material such as silicone rubber to form slots (98) having slot openings of a desired shape. In a preferred embodiment, a light absorptivity enhancement material such as iron oxide introduced into the silicone rubber causes formation of a flexible support blank that operationally adequately absorbs light within a light absorption wavelength range. A beam positioner (106) receiving commands from a programmed controller causes a UV laser beam of a wavelength that is within the light absorption wavelength range to cut into the mask multiple slots with repeatable, precise dimensions. Each of the slots cut has opposed side margins that define between them a slot opening of suitable shape to receive a miniature component (10) and to exert on it optimal holding and release forces.